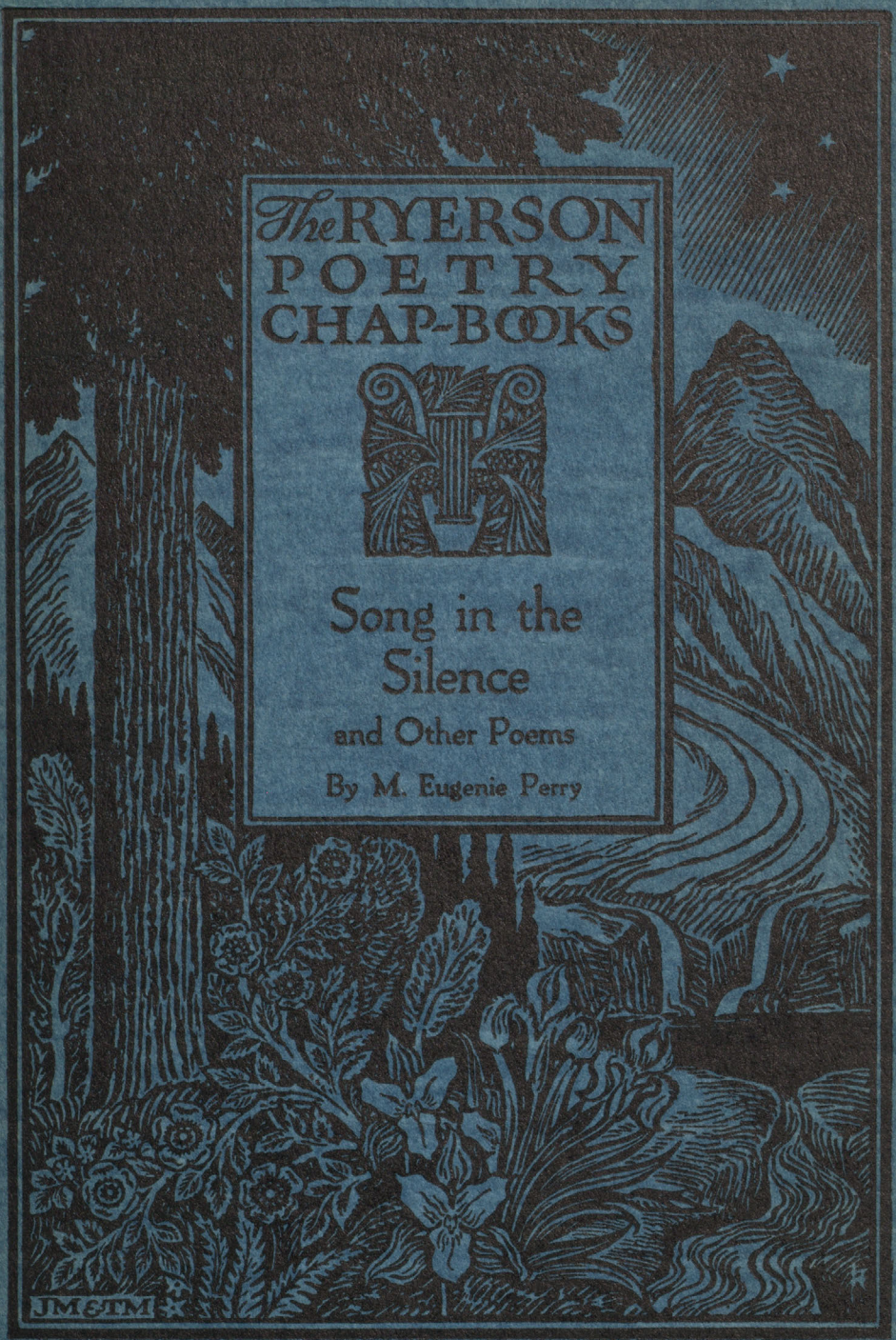

The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS
Song in the
Silence
and Other Poems
By M. Eugenie Perry
JM&TM

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OF THIS EDITION OF *SONG IN THE SILENCE AND OTHER POEMS*, BY M. EUGENIE PERRY, FIVE HUNDRED COPIES ONLY HAVE BEEN PRINTED.

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To

MY FATHER

who loved the fields and woods.

M. EUGENIE PERRY, a third-generation Canadian, was born in Kirkfield, Ontario, of Irish-Scotch parents. She has lived for many years in Victoria, B.C., where she is an officer and past president of the Victoria and Islands' Branch of the Canadian Authors' Association. She is editor of the "Home Chat" page of the *Western Recorder*, under the name of Perry Page. Her work has appeared in scores of magazines and newspapers in Canada, the British Isles, and the United States, and consists of poetry, short stories, children's features, and plays. Her first Chap-Book appeared in 1942 under the title of *Hearing a Far Call*. The poems in the present collection appeared originally in *Canadian Poetry Magazine*, *Profile*, *Alberta Poetry Yearbook*, *Colonist*, *Winnipeg Free Press*, *Contemporary Verse*, *Western Verse* and the *Washington Post*.

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The Ryerson Poetry Chapbooks

SONG IN THE SILENCE

I

SUMMER

She paused, then ran a little, light and swift,
Ran as a bird runs, curious to see
What Jarrod saw,
So still beneath the cedar's emerald fringe.
A flash of black and yellow through the tree,
And so she knew one of her namesakes here,
The goldfinch linnet.

His hand held out, though not with any thought
Of touching her, the tall boy turned—
He always seemed to know when Linnet came—
"The bird—the sweet—song": his studied speech
Was difficult and harsh.

Slowly, as drawn by some uncharted urge,
Nearer and nearer she came until his eyes,
Flecks of green-gold firing their grey, now burned
Deep into hers with their young brown-pansy tinge;
And so, poised as for sudden flight, she heard—
Lovely and special as in spring the first warm rain—
The beaded thread of song
Spaced from the quivering throat of the small bird.

Then, and it could have been his eyes' strange light,
Or thinking how his heart had heard the sound
His ears would never hear, a fluttering fright
Held her; and now she flew back through the trees.
Her hair, the colour buckwheat honey shows,
Frilled in the breeze,
Hazel and poplar snatched at her dress as she ran,

Crying: "Alan, oh! Alan!" for the usual seemed
So precious now. Sensing perhaps her fear, upset,
Or what it was, her cousin came—
A Tiger moth was struggling in his net—
Calling when he saw Jarrod: "What? That boy?—"
"No, no, he never annoys me, the boy who works
Each summer at the Tarrants' farm—a friend."

Then: "Alan, see, the varied greens of the leaves,
And the river shining there at the path's end.
I feel so safe, so happy here with you—
Like children, chasing butterflies."
He laughed and teased: "Well, why not, here with *me?*"
And life was smooth and simple for her again.

Linnet was seventeen then, Alan eighteen.
They were so young that day, two years ago.
Now to arrange her hair so the waves would show,
And her dress—flowered dimity in apple-green—
Was so important. Life swelled to its flow.

"A woman grown when somebody plans a lark,
But not yet quite a woman when work is asked,"
Is Grandmother's wry remark.
"Young things must have their fun"; her father looked
Indulgently at his girl. But she danced away,
For voices called, and she knew her guests arrived—
Friends of her high-school days in the near-by town,
Opal and Elenore, and a casual boy—
To toss a ball on the ragged tennis court
Her father had contrived,
To laugh with Alan underneath the tree—
The Manitoba maple before the house that forked
To eighteen branching limbs
Sprung from one root-stock prairie fires had left.

Alan was paramount now, the centre, source
Of all the fun, parrying the glances flown
From Opal's bright dark eyes.
He had the ease from training and the chance
That physical beauty gives, the swing, the nonchalance.

Surrendering her racquet to set the table out,
Linnet, used to considering him her own,
Was proud and piqued in turn.
She poised delphiniums in a lustre jar,
Brought lemonade, and little sugared cakes,
Ginger and caraway, and honey spread
On Grandmother's homemade bread.

A battered car came scuffling along the drive
Running between the caragana rows,
And Jarrod wriggled from its depths—
Some errand for Tarrant's farm—she turned away,
Busy, her friends were here.

Then the word "friend"—had she the worth it takes?
She skipped a few steps forward, waved and called;
Then quickly with her fingers made the signs
He had taught her, lettering: "Lemonade and cakes?"
He glanced beyond her at the strenuous game,
And then at her, giving her that strange look—
Something uncanny, unnamed, seeming to dawn
Deep in his eyes.
He shook his head, then: "Well—" reached for a glass;
"To please me, just," she realized, as he smiled,
Swallowed the syrup quickly, and was gone.
"Love two," comes from the court; a robin sings;
Three ants invade her rose-embroidered cloth.
A summer day, fragrant and bright, till a cloud swings
Idly across the sky.

The summer leaves are still, veined emeralds hung
Against a sky-blue screen. A faint dust-sift
Has dulled them, as a lover's jewelled gift
Films in disuse when all love's songs are sung.
In spring the leaves are gay, their colours—flung
To every breeze in graceful nod and lift—
Banner defiance to a north wind-shift,
As love comes laughing when the heart is young.
But now the leaves are still, the summer air
Suave as the white kid of a wedding glove
Yellowing in a chest. Leaves of the lime,
Last years of youth, knowing the moment fair
Parade their beauty till recorder Time
Stabs a cruel period to growth, and love.

II

AUTUMN

September came, magicking all the land,
The sunsets flamed across the sky in rivalry
With clustered cranberries and goldenrod.
Even the rudeness of the prairie winds
Was muted in the bronze of bracken and grass;
While elfin fingers fanned
The leaves of Linnet's multiple maple tree.
Then as the weeks passed, and the time drew on
For college in the East—this his first term—
Alan came from the city for a halcyon week.

For Linnet the tempo of life was at its height;
And the swift, laughing hours in the yellowing woods,
Or guiding the raft where the shallow rapids curled,
Would merge into the warmth of first young love.
Alan was hers, and the meaning and joy of the world
Seemed clear and definite.
There was a house called love, and tenderly there
Two dwelt, free from the fear of life,
Or any adverse thing; for while love held
There was no fear.
Even the shy, the Linnets, could live in this house,
Safe as a coted dove.
Then he was gone, but the months would soon wing by,
So happily filled with his letters, her hopes and dreams.

But the wistfully-looked-for letters failed to come.
And then disaster! October barely here,
And all the world vibrating to the hum
The giant tractors made:
A quick freeze blasted the still-standing grain!
Then a thaw, and a fall of snow while the leaves yet hung
On maple and oak; and wherever the soft snow clung
The branches weighted and broke, and all one night
The noise of their snapping cracked through the wind's dirge.

Next morning the trees were swathed in flounces of snow:
"Lovely as girls in their confirmation dress,"
Linnet exclaimed. But the broken branches lay
On garden and drive; so she tossed on her jersey and tam
To help old Ben and her father clear them away.

She hurried around in the sun,
Throwing her heaping armloads into the sleigh,
Damp from exertion and drifts that were melting then,
Till a knifing wind drove her indoors with her call:
"Anyone bring us the mail?"
But the mail had come and there was no letter again;
And she shed her clothes to Grandmother's scolding tones.

Fever and pain, and days that run heavily by;
Sometimes uneasy sleep, but soon
A sudden spasm of coughing racks through her brain,
Straining the delicate balance in her ears.

One morning when the sun pledged Indian summer
She awoke into a room curiously still.
She listened for the voices of the farm—
Her father's whistle to the dog, the crow
Of the vain Orpington rooster, the heifer's low—
Listened, nerves strained, heart beating fast, until
The dreadful conviction grew:
"The sounds are going on, but not for you!"

Followed for Linnet a hazy interlude,
Her body gaining vigour every day,
Her mind a maelstrom of bewilderment,
In this new silent world.

Friends came, a little shy of tragedy
But trying to understand—
As Elenore, crying softly, holding her hand;
And Linnet could bear it, loving Elenore.
But Opal, worldlier, curiosity in her glance,
Came too, and asked—having to write it down—
Would Alan come for the Christmas holiday?
Would Alan come? There lay the crux, the core
Of all her dread.

Life was a game to Alan—so dark and bright,
Swift as the creatures of the woods in flight;
Yet to the limned conventions so alive—
Feeling only the fittest should survive;
There was no vice in Alan, little divine;
For him, chosen of fortune, the sun must shine!

And now his letter came: "A little late,"
Was her dull thought.
Easy and pleasant, without sentiment,
He told of college life, new friends it brought.
He had not heard yet of her trouble which seemed
To her so huge it darkened every hour;
And now must she renounce her house called love?

Night is the enemy. Nothing tangible stirs
To dike the flooding memories. Distrust
And terror strike, and Linnet knows no just
Defence against these midnight harriers;
For vanity recedes when love occurs,
The simple plays of youth dissolve to dust,
And for the sensitive the keenest thrust—
Was ever mind more sensitive than hers?
Clutching, and there is agony in the move,
The virgin pallor of her pillow's twin,
She learns that what is held for love may prove
The thoughtless flourish of a javelin.
But even enemy night oils in its groove;
With mocking panoply the day comes in.

It took one day but many tears to write
Her simple answer, loosening her hold—
She knew now it was but a tenuous one,
For no one had been told
The plans they made for summers on the farm
And winters to be lived in glamorous places,
With theatres, balls, and—his idea—new faces.

III

WINTER

Alan had come, and this to him for grace—
But Linnet then and always would grant him grace—
Just for a day at the mocking Christmas-tide
When Linnet could hardly rise to Peace on Earth.
His usual affectionate if off-hand self,
He made it oh! so clear—
And this in answer to her letter's cry—
She was his very dear, his almost-sister.

"Oh! never, never," how her heart cried, "that!"
"What of a kiss," he laughed, "or two or three—
Little in meaning as a pretty girl should see."
"But he did mean it, he did! he meant it then!"
She told herself, so needing to believe
At least that much
When every hope day brought, night would retrieve.

Now through each day of empty silence wove
The strange, the devastating power of love.
Gethsemane was hard, but strength was found;
The strength, the sweetness, scarcely of strength, but found.
Ah, were all vigilling, suffering ones of earth
Given a moiety of that strength if they
Were worthy of its use.
"For me, too, Lord, if worthy, strength!"
This little one, this Linnet, being humble, prayed.

The family doctor, when his amblings curved
Towards the farm, came once and yet again;
And thought time would restore the sense now lost.
"Best to keep warm, though, and avoid the wind,
For caution must be served."
Grandmother snorted: "Doctors like to talk!
But nothing, to my mind,
Will clear the cobwebs like a good brisk walk."

So Linnet fastened her ulster to face the weather,
And found her small red cap.
Her father always smiled, seeing her in it,
Calling her then: "My little redpoll linnet."
Little and round too as a bird, he said,
And soft as linnet fluff her honey hair.

He was a man who knew and loved the birds—
The orioles and the martins of the farm,
That guard the trees and fodder for the herds
When grasshoppers and small May beetles swarm.
He listened for the meadowlark's first song,
And found the king rail's slyly hidden nest
Beside the slough where the bittern sounds his gong,
And Canada geese in autumn come to rest.

He stalled the reaper to watch the redpolls fly
Across the fields in harvest when the grain
Dropped from the sheaves, and thought their share of rye
And wheat a just proportion in the chain
That in the morning of the world was spanned
To save for man the green things of the land.

She listlessly rescued her snowshoes from the hook
Where they had hung the miserable winter through,
Went cross-field to the river, and so along
Beneath the willow and the hazel ranks
Marching so January-stiff above the banks—
Always in winter silent, now more still
Than any place should be.

A few light flakes of snow came weeping down,
And was there a faint vibration through the hush?
Or did the thought of some such day last year
Presage the sound of chopping in Tarrant's bush?
She smelled the piney smell of new-cut wood,
And glimpsed through the trees a patch of vivid orange
She knew for Jarrod's tuque.

He swung his axe to a trunk and left it grooved,
Came running towards her and his lips moved,
Then knowing, for hearsay travels fast and far,
His laboured speech unnecessary now,
Took pad and pencil from his mackinaw
And wrote in a spate about a new device
For those who still possessed some little power—
Himself having none—to hear the spoken word.

. . . . . .

Linnet, as always on her visits there,
Found that the city exhausted her frail strength—
Too many currents of thought and energy
Pushing against her mind.
Her half-uncle, Alan's father, always kind,
Was rarely in his home. His wife away—
When was she not?—he occupied himself
In grubbing for money to answer her demands.
His good old housekeeper welcomed his country niece;
And guided her shopping, when Linnet, lagging, saw
The soiled slush of the streets in the February thaw
That bade the women loose their fabulous furs.

And Jarrod, now in his third college year,
Showed her, and proudly, through the school where he
Would soon be teaching.
She was amazed, though saddened by the cause,
At all now being done for these small ones
Who, fated never to know sound, must train
Just that much more the hands and eyes and brain.
Jarrod, in this environment, was something more
Than she had ever sensed, bigger, more vital.
And Linnet, later, fitted with the aid to hear,
Knew, and yes was surprised herself to know,
Some impulse, new incentive, flooding her back
To normal life again,
Setting in place her personal tragedy.

IV

SPRING

Since the first poet carved a runic lay
The bards have harped on simple strains—the may
That carmines in the spring, the fielded drove
Of cattle, the sea's harvest, and man's love
Of woman; yet through their revealing words
Always has pulsed the pearl-clear song of birds.
When the first woman wept in Paradise,
Was there a rippling solace from the skies?
The maimed in Normandy praying soon release
Would smile to hear the linnets presage peace;
And when the poet weaves the world's last rune
Something of bird-song will be in that tune.

"One man's about the same as any other,"
Grandmother said one day,
"When you've been married for a year or so."
But Linnet knew this treason to all dreams,
And thought how life had been a sweeter thing
Could she remember, had she known, her mother.

Now, churning near the lintel of the kitchen door—
No longer need to beg her "lend a hand"—
She saw the season's first anemones,
The lifted white of their cups lithe in the breeze;

And then a living streak of black and orange—
The oriole that nested every year
In the fringe of poplar where the woods began.
And Grandmother mused—coming to stand there, too:
"The birds are always busy in the spring,
Loving and nesting, when life begins again;
And not just birds, but humans, or even the trees
Feeling the rise of sap."
Then, though she must have known her words would wring
A tender heart, yet feeling "a word in season"
Never amiss:
"The time for new beginnings is the spring."

Linnet, that evening, savouring Grandmother's words—
Though knowing the casual boy who had crossed her mind—
Stood waiting quietly under the maple tree;
Not for some dreamed-of knight-in-armour-shining,
But Jarrod, rattling his car along the drive;
Jarrod, who loved her, she had known deep down,
Known with some queer alarm:
Not for his love, but more for that strange gift,
Genius, or power—how name it?—that wrapped him round.
Alan? Ah! that was self; self and the charm,
The primeval warmth he wore so carelessly.
From Alan though the privilege, pain-hooved,
Never in life forgotten, of having hopelessly loved.

Now, all around her Nature's impulse stirred:
Fragrance of bud, breath from the turned earth,
Simmer and sound of bird and insect breed.
With Jarrod—ah! here lay her hope of serving,
Serving him and his kind.
That aura was not the sinister thing of her dread,
But strength instead, some following of the Gleam,
And greater even than his love for her.
She would be Ruth leaving her people and home;
She would be lonely often, missing her friends;
Yet, barriered from much of life she knew,
More confidence in destiny might come.
Then, in the silence the song of life would swell,
As on that morning in the woods his heart had heard
The song his ears would never hear,
The song the linnet sang, her own name bird.

HUMMINGBIRD

Darting from flower to flower the hummingbird
Gleams in his feathering of red and green.
The lady, darting too, quaintly absurd,
Cuts fragrant branches from her woodbine screen
To carry to a neighbour's ailing child.
She wears gay silks to mock the spinning years—
Love, has it passed while little cares beguiled
Her days? She laughs to still her clutching fears;
And hums a measure of lost melody
Timed to the waltz; then patterns in her mind
A gold gown for the dance for charity:
Her fading youth and beauty loath to find
A mirror in the bird-sprite flashing by—
So bright, so lovely, and so soon to fly.

NETTLE-SHY

Question:

I, being shy of nettles, would pose this:
Find me this side Arabia tears of myrrh
Numbing the point-of-pin
Thin thrusts that disrupt my hours;
So may I sense the sun of recompense
Lining the checkering cloud.

For you who are mover of mountains
Great drums roll;
And the waters are oceans beneath your keels;
Persimmons and passion fruit fly to your nod;
Thistles and thorns skate harmless on your skin:
You, mover of mountains,
Striding as strides a giant
On your regardless way.

Answer:

If only the whicker of a small stream
You seem to hear;
The tangy flavour of the wild plum for your delight;
Find this to compensate for prick-of-pin:
Who knows the tear of thorns knows too
Perfume of briar rose.

THE LONELY SHELL

Far from the waves that soothed
  Its earliest day,
Spurning the tossed dark earth
  The seashell lay;
Frail in its element
  Of heavy clay.

Strange that this homestead knew
  Winged sail and prow;
Strange that this fertile field,
  Quick to the plow,
Bedded the sea in years
  Forgotten now.

Slanting the ocean depths
  The weird light fell;
Creatures of lesser life,
  Lulled to the swell,
Fashioned of pearl and rose
  This lonely shell.

IVORY, APES, AND PEACOCKS

Oh, vain and loud and empty in review—
The coils men weave for coronets and courts,
As ivory, apes, and peacocks passing through
In ancient galleons bound from Eastern ports.

The ivory images young hope erects
To bolster life from torments of the real,
Are they the treasures eager youth expects,
Or wooden ninepins lacquered planes conceal?

The apes, of all the tribe the genesis,
Oppose all thought, original or frail;
And now, what simple barnyard fowl is this
Flaunting a fanned imaginary tail?

Oh, empty in review! oh, vain! oh, loud!
The ivory, apes, and peacocks of the crowd.

FALL OF THE MIGHTY

Even the hawk the black merlin
Is slowed
By the bitter erosion of years;
Ah, remember the swift the dangerous swoop—
Thin high scream, weak prey cowers, is still—
Now his grace all his ferine puissance
Must face the belittling of age.

And so man the predator in youth,
Arrowing in stadiumed games,
Proffers his body's perfection;
Man the dictator, the vicious
And loud-mouthing caesars of sawdust;
Man the keen warrior the patriot,
All, all,
Parade in the circle of moment—
Female eyes spark their prodding eulogium—
Then as the buck and the hawk come
Down the green roads to the end.

See how the hawk the black merlin
Balefully hunched
On the prongs of the rear-garden hedge,
Hunger-forced from his refuge the ivy
Hugging the ribs of the oak—
Once a grouse now a titmouse his quarry—
Falls victim in turn to the lightning
Parabola of the prowling cat.

PENUMBRA

Not one of all lives in the full light,
For you as for himself never the full light;
Always the dimmed motive and the shadow's draw.

Not any love he knows defies the full light,
The electrified clear vision of the real light;
His flame of reason gutters in the dread—
As one goes running naked in a dream,
Horror is there and the nameless last abyss.

WHOM YOU MUST FEAR

Whom you must fear, whose approval claim,
Lives in your own mind.
He who is neighbour only, even the good neighbour,
Varies his score of you
As a swallow swerves in the sky;
Who is high friend, a sorcerer
Conning the crystal sphere of your moods,
Comes and is swiftly gone;
Even your best-loved, cabined by home,
Grist to your soaring pride,
Death, or a seismic war, or the call to mate,
Sirens away.

There is but one, held as by ball and chain,
Couples you to the grave.
Ah! if assured of winning
That inseverable censor's vote
How is your bullion safe:
Safe from the spidered machinations of vain men,
Safe from the goose-clack of light women's tongues.
Whom you must fear, whose approval claim,
Lives in your own mind.

TANAGER

Swiftly the gold-jerkin, black-wing tanager dips,
Then swings his crimson head in thirsty savouring
Of man-mean, gouged-for-sparrow garden pool;
Now up, and proud with the grace of skimming ships
Spirals for way, then is off on wing-wise fathoming
Of fabulous sea-blue heights, sun-clean, air-cool.

Watcher, roof-railed from Heaven, slave to the whips
Of custom, lives life in little, little challenging,
Close-tied—too, ah! too long—to man-minted tool;
And Fancy only, galleon-precious, slips
Her earth-noose, and goes free, goes boldly heavening—
O, tanager-lovely, drunk-with-glory fool!

TERROR IN BEAUTY

How may the beauty of bright birds atone
The predatory fury of the hawk;
And on that darkest day could Peter own
The iridescent wonder of the cock
Bugling his shrill disdain.

No evil is inherent in the bland
New sheen of silver, free from rust or stain;
Yet thirty pieces clutched in Judas' hand
Unleashed the ultimate crime—though small the gain
Gilding the traitor's fee.

The scarlet bud crowns Nature's ecstasy;
But on the Man soon to be crucified
They placed a scarlet robe in mockery—
And red the drops of blood pricked from His side
Rosing the soldier's lance.

So precious, beauty; and so pitiless—
The gold of summer suns, the storm's advance
Night-swift and terrible. Terror and loveliness—
The angel with the lightning in his glance
Riving the sepulchre stone.

SCROLL AND COLOUR

Life is a jewel of flame and intricate whorl,
  For sparks strike from the doubtful grey of flint;
Even the petal smoothness of the pearl
  Will amplify to rings of rainbow tint.

Each in its fashion, each in its own degree—
  Roughness of quartz, the suavity of oil—
But underneath, the spars of porphyry,
  The veins of latent gold, gleam and uncoil.

The facets of a lovely action bring
  Irradiation to the meanest clod;
The spurious cut, imperfect levelling,
  Will scratch the surface of the costliest gaud.

Always the master Lapidary's art
Concerns the scroll and colour at the heart.

THE ONLY DAY

Hammer blows to the toll of twelve
Dial the inevitable noon.
Snare the sun-shot zenith of the only day.
Hurry!

There is no yesterday:
Sheared by the sickle of Time,
Squandered or garnered
As the peacock moments plied.
There is no available yesterday!

Nor is there sure tomorrow.
Smash in fine frenzy the rose spectacles
Thieving the only day,
Fools dream while knock-once Fate
Tallies the inexorable hours,
For who dares warrant tomorrow?

Now and now alone is life.
Weave the superlative tale,
Sing the ineffable song,
Render immortal in colour the poignant scene;
Or if in search of love, bind love.
Only the incomparable *now* is vital.
Hurry!

THE MAINSPRING

Man may be martyred in bondage,
  Flailed to the mine and the plow;
Seeding from each murdered hostage,
  Ten will be enemies now.

Shatter his home and his city;
  Alter his intimate plan;
Know his integrity stiffen,
  Witness the growth of a man.

Will to be free is the mainspring.
  Genius of hate may reveal
Metal to bend, never break it—
  This is the ultimate steel!

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The Ryerson Poetry Chap-Books

Lorne Pierce—Editor

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